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THE EXPERIENCES
.....OF.....
Company "L" 368th Infantry

A
UNIT OF THE



BLACK BUFFALO DIVISION

TOLD IN VERSE

Typical of a Soldier's Life in France

PRICE 25 CENTS

BY SGT. CHESTER J. WESTFIELD

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CHESTER J. WESTFIELD

PREFACE

This poem is based on facts gathered by the writer, who was a sergeant in Company "L" 368th Infantry. It was written to give some of the life and spirit of the individual soldier; in narrating the events of the Argonne drive; the pronoun "we" refers to the regiment as a unit, and of course the supporting artillery is taken in consideration.

The writer wishes to express his appreciation of the kindness of his friends in giving suggestions and helping correct the manuscript.

CHESTER J. WESTFIELD

 MAY 16 1919

The Voyage to France.

The news came, "You'll go over."

But we did not think it true
Till mechanics marked our boxes
With letters white and blue.

Then we were certain of going
Over there to fight;
For they moved us from Camp Meade
One cloudy Wednesday night.

The boys began to say aloud:
"Our Uncle Sam ain't jokin'."
For we all went thru New Jersey,
Pennsylvania, to Hoboken.

They soon began to realize
Their going far from home.
Aboard the ship George Washington,
As she plowed the rippling foam.

After a voyage of thirteen days
Over the broad and watery main,
We entered the Bay of Biscay,
Along the northern coast of Spain.

We had gone more than five thousand miles,
Sailing out from the peaceful West,
When we sighted land one evening
And anchored in the port of Brest.

TO THE THE TRAINING AREA.

We disembarked from our trusty ship,
Then two or three miles went,
And slept on the ground in sight of
The Pontanezen cantonment.

There were no cushions for our heads,
No warmth indeed for our feet,
But scant the water to quench our thirst,
And scarce enough to eat.

After a stay of a week or more,
A-living 'mid dew and rain,
We next marched to the station
At Brest to board a train.

The weary soldiers were seated,
With their packs near to their feet;
A three days' ration was issued
For the hungry men to eat.

These rations consisted of bread and jam,
Many cans of pork and beans.
This fare we enjoyed until we passed
Thru the towns of Tours and Orleans.

For full three days we rode southeast,
And no sign of barracks found,
But at Passavant we were glad to put
Our feet once more on the ground.

From Passavant over hills and valleys
We marched on with a will;
Our packs cut our shoulders severely
Ere we stopped at Figneville.

It was there two white lieutenants came,
And several weeks they stayed.
They taught us to play "Old Grady"
And to use the hand grenade.

An order came for us to move
Across the river Saone;
We pitched our tents in a field near by
The village called Lathone.

At Lathone the drilling was hard
And burdensome to our backs,
For our exercises were done
With rifles and full packs.

ON THE VOSGES FRONT.

In trucks from there we moved
About seventy miles away;
And at eve we billeted in houses and barns,
In the village, Le Rolier.

Soon an order came that read:
"On to the front, you'll fill a gap."
And at night we were hauled from there
To the city of Raon l'Étape.

On the journey many were frightened
And murmured a hurried prayer,
For the German airmen were trying
To bomb us from the air.

The thought then came to the men
Of filling a dangerous front-line trench,
For the automatic gunners were sent
To the front along with the French.

But the French and American soldiers
Could not each understand,
So the other part of the units
Went forward, not leaving a man.

All thru the day 'twas quiet,
And we did not have to fight,
But the Huns threw bombs on our trenches
About nine o'clock each night.

At night we patrolled No Man's Land
Thru acres of close-laid wire;
In danger of discovery by lighted flares,
And of death by machine gun fire.

After a stay of several days
From the front we were turned aloose
And carried back for recreation
To the station of La Juas.

We remained there some days more,
A-drilling 'mid cold and rain,
Ere our company was called together
To go to the front again.

We moved that day to a mountain,
Which little shelter gave,
But we made the best of it by using
A protecting rock or cave.

The captain said: "My boys,
Your days up here'll be few,
For we go on trucks to-morrow
To entrain at Corcieux."

THE MEUSE-ARGONNE OFFENSIVE.

We thought of the front-line trench,
But all of us kept cool
Till we detrained along the Marne,
Near the city of St. Manould.

We were put off the road in a forest,
Hun airmen our troops could not see;
And happy, blithe, and hilarious,
We knocked apples off a tree.

From the forest early next morning,
O'er rough roads we hiked on still,
Till we reached some French artillery
Hid behind a rocky hill.

An order came to us that night
Which tried each brave man's nerve:
"Your regiment will go up to-morrow
With Company L in reserve."

We passed Vienne le Chateau,
And good entrenchments found
On a high and rugged hill
Above a shell-torn town.

On the hill we were determined,
And this was the officer's plan :
To hold that hill from the Germans
At the price of death to each man.

On our advance the watchful airplanes
Soared o'er us with many a bombing flier.
On the ground were wire entanglements
And heavy machine gun fire.

At last, sometime that night,
We took over a front-line trench.
On our right were white Americans,
And on our left the suave French.

I looked around next morning
When machine gun shots I heard,
And saw they had wounded severely
My comrade, Corporal Baird.

We pushed them back over tangled wire,
Thru valley and over hill,
And ended our part of the Argonne drive
At the village of Binarville.

After many Huns we'd captured,
Wounded, or gassed and slain,
We bombarded their bridges which offered
retreat
Across the River Aisne.

Many brave deeds were done there
By men who never knew fear,
Till the French and Italians relieved us,
Then triumphant we marched to the rear.

THE SOLDIERS GO BACK FOR RECREATION.

The march from there was very severe,
But each man did his best,
For, being exposed to artillery fire,
We could not stop to rest.

Hungry and thirsty, we could not enjoy
The beautiful mountain scenes,
But Sergeant Brown helped save my life
With an extra can of beans.

We marched some days to a station,
And a crowded train did catch;
Following the Moselle River,
We detrained near the town of Marbach.

Our officers tried to get barracks,
Doing the best they could;
They found none, and the soldiers slept
Exposed to rain, in the wood.

There were few new supplies of food,
Still fewer of the old were left;
Rations were gotten here and there,
Each warrior cooked for himself.

After living there for several days
We packed up and hiked away,
And made our home on the River Moselle,
In a town by the name of Pompey.

Though Pompey was an excellent town,
'Twas not to all our boys fancy;
Many slipped off in the gloom of night
To visit the city of Nancy.

Now, most of the boys thought Nancy
Was the best little town in the world,
For here their lives were brightened by wine
Or a lively chat with a girl.

After a period of seventeen days,
Our tramping was kept up still;
By wading thru much mud and water
We reached the village Franchville.

But Franchville was dull and solemn,
And our boys cared not to stay,
So the officers showed their sympathy
By marching us back to Pompey.

BEFORE METZ.

After waiting in Pompey for orders
For about five days or more,
Then a march was made to a dugout
Near the village of Gezoncourt.

Our superior officer said: "My boys,
You're not thru fighting yet."
And on the tenth of November we went
To fight at bloody Metz.

For each hour of fighting we thought
We'd lose a thousand or more,
For the number of hours we meant to attack
Was three times twenty-four.

After passing thru many dangers
In combating our subtile foes,
The message came at seven o'clock
That the war would probably close.

At eleven the big guns ceased roaring;
The machine guns quit raising Cain;
The Boche stopped firing along the line;
God smiled on the earth again!

We were glad when the message came
That America would fight no more,
And victorious we rolled our packs
And marched for Gezoncourt.

PERIOD OF WAITING.

We endured water and mud for a month,
Then began our movement home,
And slung our packs and marched for miles
To catch a train at Maron.

The boys were hungry and tired,
And their packs were heavy as lead,
And some of our comrades who were gassed
at the front,
On the hike, fell unconscious or dead.

Our superiors said: "Don't worry, boys,
We'll go home as soon as we can."
But, lousy and dirty, were compelled to stay
Several weeks longer in St. Julien.

Each man had a vision of sweetheart or wife
And no doubt of his parental house;
When at last we journeyed westward
To Le Mans in order to delouse.

We longed for our homes in America,
In the far-off golden West,
When we were moved 'side the foaming sea
To the forwarding camp at Brest.

We had helped to conquer the Iron Man,
Who for glory and power did crave,
And were ready to sail for home again,
To the land of the true and the brave!

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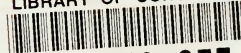


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